

August 6, 2018

Senator Caferro and Committee Members
Director Villa and Director Hogan

Re: Medicaid Reimbursement

I am here as the office manager for a denturist's office in Great Falls, Secretary for the Denturist Association of Montana and as well as a concerned citizen. While I understand mental health and treatment for addiction are of great concern in Montana, dental health and denture services are important as well.

I know it was discussed last Wednesday, however, many of you may not have been at the DPHHS listening session. Let me remind you that proper digestion begins in the mouth. Chewing activates enzymes in the saliva that begins the complete breakdown of necessary nutrients the body needs to function. Not chewing properly means the body does not get all of these nutrients. Thus, a person not getting the nutrition they need creates a situation that will result in further health consequences creating a vicious circle of poor health and greater medical expenses. Poor dental health conditions are linked to heart disease, diabetes, respiratory disease, strokes and premature births, only to mention a few. These are all conditions that will cost the state and the taxpayers far more than providing the funds for proper dental health and denture services.

Working for a primary care provider, I see these types of situations regularly where patients have been unable to function properly with little, poor, or no dentition. Restoring their ability to chew properly leads to better nutrition and better health. Surgeons will often not perform life-saving procedures if there is a chance that gum disease and infection from poor dental health is rampant in their patient's body. Therefore, the funding of dental and denture services is vital to the health and well-being of Montanans.

In addition, self-esteem and the ability to talk properly because of well-functioning dentures is not inconsequential nor just cosmetic. The ability to present oneself with dignity is important to function in society, especially when applying for a job, for instance.

Thirdly, there are procedures that are more than a one-part process. In the case of immediate dentures, the first part is fabricating and placement of the dentures right after extractions, with temporary liners inserted during the bone's healing and shrinking period of up to a year. The second part of this procedure is to rebuild/refit the denture to the new healed shape of the gums and ridges. This begins with new impressions and rebuilding the denture to fit the mouth. Although the dentures and temporary liners may have been covered under Medicaid's standard benefit allowance, the rebuild or refit were not when the cuts were enacted. This left these

patients with ill fitting dentures they could not afford to have reconstructed which leads to the other health problems that can occur with improper nutrition.

The people being affected by these cuts were not financially able pay for their dentures in the first place, therefore they were not financially able to complete the process. By restoring the funds for the remaining part of the immediate denture process, these patients will be able to finish the process started last year and restore their dentures to a proper functioning condition.

While dental and hygiene patients could have their teeth examined, cleaned, restored with fillings and crowns, and extracted, the denture patients were abandoned. They were not allowed the possibility of having their extracted teeth replaced with a prosthetic nor could they have their existing dentures cared for. A great many of those patients, who vitally needed extractions would go without because they had to choose whether to be toothless or live with a body full of contamination from infections. Other patients had to make the choice of living with ill-fitting and broken dentures or going without treatment. In either case, this is unacceptable.

The health risks these cuts created for our poor, our seniors and our disabled patients far outweighs the savings for the State of Montana and its taxpayers.

According to the proposed MAR 37-859, the dental services cut by MAR 37-828 (1/12/18) are being restored. Does that mean that the January 1, 2018 fee schedule will also be restored to the July 1, 2016 level for denture services?

Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Carol Casteel".

Carol Casteel, Ofc. Mgr., and Admin. Sec.
First Impressions Denture Clinic LLC
and Denturist Association of Montana